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ABSTRACT

Traditional Ojibway education is currently being delivered by eight First Nations communities on Manitoulin Island and the north shore of Lake Huron, in Ontario. Integration into the formal school system, with the exception of language programs, is not formally established. Elders and traditional teachers are only invited by individual teachers. Integration of the formal education system into the traditional Ojibway system also takes place, through field trips, albeit to a limited extent. Cultural knowledge is transmitted via one-to-one transmission, home-based learning, talking circles, community cultural events, workshops and conferences, and traditional Ojibway institution-based learning. Traditional educational approaches are profoundly different from those of the mainstream educational system. Wholistic (physical, mental, spiritual, emotional) growth and development of the person, experiential learning, oral tradition, and student-centeredness are key elements of the traditional approach. Further, and of vital importance, is the fact that education is grounded in spirituality. Western mainstream education has a narrower scope in that it emphasizes intellectual development to the exclusion of other dimensions. There are a number of concerns related to integrating informal Native education into the formal education system. These include research methodologies utilized; protection of cultural and intellectual property rights; and recognition of traditional indigenous knowledge, traditional teachers, and elders. (Contains 31 references.) (TD)

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INTRODUCTION

In keeping with Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute's mission to provide a qualitative, wholistic, First Nation's based education, the institute, in collaboration with OISE/UT is participating in the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning research network. The overall aims of the project are to:

- document relations between informal learning, formal learning and nonformal education
- identify major social barriers to integrating informal learning with formal and nonformal
- programs and certifications
- support new programs that promise to overcome these social barriers.

The focus of Working Group 3 of the project is to study the informal learning cultures of major disadvantaged social groups and explore means for more effectively linking these forms of knowledge with the formal education system. The particular project which Kenjgewin Teg is involved in is entitled, "Informal Learning Culture Through the Life Course: Initiatives in Native Organizations and Communities". The first phase of the project involves an examination of the formal, informal and non-formal learning practices of Kenjgewin Teg and its member First Nation communities. This paper will explore formal and informal concepts and educational approaches within the context of the traditional Ojibway world view and how such approaches are carried out within the communities partnered with Kenjgewin Teg.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods employed in this project included literature searches, analysis of archival materials, personal interviews and participant observation. The researcher is a member of the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, and is a former curriculum development officer of Waubetek Training Institute, which subsequently became Kenjgewin Teg Training Institute. She has also been employed as a part-time instructor for Kenjgewin Teg Training Institute. Data was collected from participants directly employed with the institute as well as from members of the larger community. Kenjgewin Teg personnel, teachers, parents, students and traditional teachers were interviewed. In a semi-structured format, the researcher discussed with the participants their knowledge and experience with respect to informal learning and its relationship to formal education. Barriers to the integration of informal

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knowledge to formal education were also discussed.

DISCUSSION

The membership of Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute is comprised of eight First Nation communities including: Cockburn Island First Nation, Sagamok Anishnabek First Nation, Ojibways of Sucker Creek First Nation, Sheguiandah First Nation, Sheshegwaning First Nation, West Bay First Nation, Whitefish River First Nation and Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. The First Nation members, located on Manitoulin Island and the north shore of Lake Huron originate from three closely related peoples: the Ojibway, Potawatomi and Odawa.

Philosophical Background

In order to better understand Ojibway traditional educational practices, it is essential that we explore the philosophical background out of which these practices emerge. Traditional Ojibway education is grounded on spirituality. Traditional institutions are based on natural law, in other words, the Creator's law. It is believed that each nation of people have a special relationship to the Creator and that this relationship entails certain responsibilities, adherence to specific laws, and an unique way of relating to the Earth and all life therein. It is premised on the principles of respect, balance and acknowledgment of all life. Knowledge, responsibilities and ways of relating to the world are passed down orally from the ancestors through the string of lives going all the way back to the beginning to the Creator and the creation of the world.

Methodologies

Central to Ojibway pedagogy is the nurturing of the individual's special gifts, talents and abilities so that he may be able to share his special gifts with his community and nation. The development of the whole person is important, thus, spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional growth is encouraged. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996):

> Learning goes on throughout the life cycle, from infancy and early childhood to old age ... In Aboriginal educational tradition, the individual is viewed as a whole person with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. Each of these must be addressed.

Vision-questing, meditation, development of intuition and dreaming are deemed to be valid methods of gaining knowledge. Indeed, during rites of passage, this is a requirement. Young men go out to fast to seek their vision. Young women, as well, partake in a similar exercise designed to teach them about womanhood and motherhood, as well as to celebrate this passage.

Story-telling plays a major role in the oral transmission of knowledge, skills and values needed to live. Stories speak of the origins of life, proper relationship to various forms of life and life experiences. Also, the sharing of one's life story and experiences is a well-established method of teaching. Stories act as mirrors wherein the learner is allowed to view him/herself and thus gain insights and understandings to help him/her along the road of life.

Both formal and informal methods in the education of children, youths and adults. Children are taught indirectly through play, story-telling and role-modelling. At other times, transmission of teachings of life occur during ceremonies and other formal occasions. Some of these ceremonies are very formal requiring the use of the high Ojibway language, a variation of the language which is used to deliver formal speeches and prayers.

In sum, traditional Ojibway educational approaches are rooted in oral tradition. They are wholistic, student-centered, experiential, and contain both formal and informal elements.

Changes

Traditional Ojibway education was disrupted by the now, well-documented history of European First Nation relations. The arrival of the Europeans and their subsequent control and domination over the

indigenous people of this land has resulted in the almost total destruction of the Ojibway education system. Under the control of the Europeans, First Nation's peoples were no longer able to control their own educational and cultural development. During this era of violence directed at indigenous people, informal, formal, culture-based, home and community-based learning practices were outlawed or otherwise almost entirely eradicated. Children were removed from their homes and placed in residential schools. Parents and grandparents were prevented from transferring their own values, wisdom and language to their children and grandchildren. The link between the parents and children was forcibly severed, thereby seriously damaging the children's identity as members of their clans, communities and nations.

As a result of this onslaught, many of the Ojibway, Potawatomi and Odawa of Manitoulin Island and the north shore do not have knowledge of their own philosophies, history and traditional systems of knowledge. Many do not speak their own language. Many have not had the opportunity to learn traditional teachings because these were never made available to them. Thus, the systematic invasion of the Europeans and their deliberate squashing of aboriginal systems have taken a severe toll on the indigenous people of this land.

However, despite the major losses that were incurred during this period in history, it is essential to note that, due to the strong conviction of some visionaries that traditional Ojibway lifeways must be kept alive, increasing numbers of families and community-based organizations within the Kenjgewin Teg catchment area have, once again, begun to see the importance of retaining and putting into practice traditional values, skills and modes of learning.

Re-building, Re-discovery, Re-searching

Within the First Nation communities partnered with Kenjgewin Teg, revitalization, relearning and re-establishment of original cultural practices has been taking place for approximately the past twenty-eight years. Figure A, on the following page, shows the nature and scope of cultural learning occurring today. Contemporary transmission of cultural knowledge occurs in a number of different modes and forums including: one-to-one transmission, home-based learning, talking circles, community cultural events, workshops/conferences and traditional Ojibway institution-based learning.

Co-operation and collaboration takes place between the various individuals and community-based organizations involved in the delivery of culture-based learning activities. These include: North American Indian Travelling College, Ojibway Cultural Foundation, Three Fires Society, Naandwedidaa (family violence prevention program), Wikwemikong Heritage Organization, in Wassa-Nabin Youth Centre, Focus Youth Group, Wikwemikong Tribal Police, Family Services, Rainbow Lodge (treatment centre), United Chiefs and Councils of Manitoulin, Naadmaaddaa Traditional Healing Facilitators, Health Centres, Boards of Education and Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute and individual traditional teachers and elders.

Resource people doing the actual cultural teaching are predominantly traditional cultural teachers, who have spent many years learning about their particular area of expertise. Participants indicated that, in some instances, 15-20 years or more of study is involved.

Figure A: Nature and Scope of Cultural Learning Activities in the Kenjgewin Teg area

i) One-on one transmission: includes apprenticeships and mentoring activities. Traditional skills and knowledge such as medicine, arts, crafts, hunting/fishing skills are transferred from teacher to student.
ii) Home-based learning: parent to child transmission. This type of learning can be described experiential, incidental or global. Language, values, hunting/fishing skills, crafts may be learned n the home.
iii) Talking Circles: are small group activities intended to facilitate sharing and healing. There are men's and women's circles. Talking circles can be characterized as interactive, semi-formal, and semi-structured. Traditional teachings and processing of emotional concerns may take place in this model of learning.
iv) Community Cultural Events: Global, incidental, experiential learning takes place at community cultural events such as pow-wows, community feasts, plays, fall fairs and art shows.
v) Workshops/Conferences: These include elders', women's, men's and youth conferences. Workshops focus on such topics as language, arts, traditional native music, native awareness and elder's knowledge. The formality of these conferences vary, depending on the presenter. In the main, they are lecture type presentations.
vi) Traditional Institutions: These include structured traditional institutions such as the Midewiwin Three Fires Society. Traditional knowledge, values, history and spiritual practices are taught in these institutions. Learning can be characterized as global, interactive and spiritually based. Formal and informal learning occurs.

Issues and Concerns

There were a number of issues and concerns in regards to informal/formal education linkages that were identified by interview participants. These include research methodologies utilized, protection of cultural and intellectual property rights and recognition of traditional indigenous knowledge, traditional teachers and elders.

Firstly, there is the issue of appropriate research methodologies. Native people have been researched and analysed, for many years, through the lens of foreign cultures and world views. Because native approaches to education and to life in general, are profoundly different from the dominant Western world view, there is a need to re-search culturally appropriate research methodologies. The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (Tribal Colleges), The American Indian Science and Engineering Society and individual scholars have taken initiatives in this direction.

A. Christensen suggests:

> We need a new frame and model for scholarship... We need to search ourselves, our work, our partnerships, our organizations to discuss, design, and set a model that works for us... The model or paradigm suggested for this frame includes an approach that illustrates the native intellect, his method of communicating, and focus on his world. (Christensen, 1996)

Another area of concern is the protection of collective cultural and intellectual property rights. There are no laws presently in existence that protect indigenous cultural property and intellectual property rights. Both the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, 1883, (patents, trademarks, designs) and the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works of 1886 failed to acknowledge the cultures of indigenous peoples. (Vaver, 1997)

> Native culture was thought to be free for the taking, the product of many and so the preserve of none ... except when it was transformed by the mediation of Europeans, whereupon it magically gained cultural legitimacy. (Vaver, 1997, p. 2)

Appropriation of traditional ideas, knowledge, cultural practices, oral tradition, legends, traditional designs, songs, and medicinal remedies is a serious concern as evidenced by the following statements:

> It scares me to think, that someday, my grandchildren will be paying a price to learn about

their culture from non-Indians. (Arlee, 1996)

> I was quite perturbed and embarrassed to find out that a non-native has organized a so-called traditional pow-wow and ceremonies...this trend is ultimately dangerous and it ultimately weakens the individuals and the community. This exploitation of native traditions and ways of learning is another good example of the infiltration and eradication of aboriginal beliefs. (Cooper, 1998)

Statements of this sort are not to be easily dismissed. The message seems to be that indigenous knowledge is valid only when delivered by non-natives, therefore you, as an indigenous person are not valid. Appropriation is belittlement of the worst kind because it essentially disregards, minimizes and depreciates indigenous people. Hence, there is a definite need for careful research, cautiousness and sensitivity in the implementation of culture-based activities.

The third major area of concern is recognition and acknowledgment of traditional knowledge and teachers. As previously mentioned, it takes many years of study for the traditional teacher to arrive at his level of knowledge. In the mainstream educational system, traditional Ojibway teachers are generally not accorded the same respect and acknowledgment as are mainstream teachers. The knowledge and expertise they carry is not recognized, possibly because it is different. As expressed by one of the participants, "Native traditional teachers and cultural activities are not given the same emphasis as is book learning, because it is not written, it is not important".

SUMMARY

Traditional Ojibway education is currently being delivered by a large number of individuals and community groups, and organizations in the Kenjgewin Teg area. Integration into the formal school system, with the exception of language programs, is not formally established. Elders and traditional teachers are generally invited by individual teachers. Also, integration of the formal education system into the traditional Ojibway system also takes place, through field trips, albeit to a limited extent.

Traditional educational approaches are profoundly different from those of the mainstream educational system. Wholistic (physical, mental, spiritual, emotional) growth and development of the person, experiential learning, oral tradition, and student-centeredness are key elements of the traditional approach. Further, and of vital importance, is the fact that it is grounded in spirituality. Western mainstream education, on the other hand, is narrower in scope. It is linear, objective, and based on rationality. Emphasis is placed almost entirely on intellectual development to the detriment of other dimensions of man. How does one fit a wholistic, open, warm, broad based educational system into a narrow, linear, objective, closed, cold system with out changing the essential nature of it? How is informal education integrated into the formal education system without formalizing it?

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